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**GUIDELINES FOR ORGANIZING
AN ELECTRONIC
CONFERENCE:**

**Lessons from the Global Consultation
on Balancing Livestock, Environment
and Human Needs**

BY

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I. Introduction

The rapid development and dissemination of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has given rise to promising new dimensions to international development research. Apart from facilitating communication, ICTs greatly enhance the ability of organizations such as the IDRC, to conduct broad-based consultations on proposed policies, development and research approaches, thus augmenting their relevance and long-term effectiveness. The results of a recent IDRC project¹ demonstrate the potential of ICTs in development research and offer lessons to make thier use more effective.

From March 10 to May 23, 1997, the IDRC, in collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and INFORUM, held a global electronic consultation on Livestock, Environment and Human Needs. The idea of a global consultation was sparked by the completion of a multi-donor study conducted by livestock specialists from the FAO, World Bank and US AID (Steinfeld et al 1997; De Haan et al 1997). Given that all three authors are from the industrialized world, IDRC suggested that the study would benefit from the incorporation of the views of a variety of stakeholders, especially those from the South. The consultation was planned as a means of drawing out these views and incorporating them into the study that would become a global position paper on livestock, environment and human needs. In an effort to ensure the widespread participation - including that of those who do not have access to E-mail, the consultation innovatively combined an electronic conference with a series of face-to-face meetings in a selected number of developing countries. The process culminated in an international (live) meeting that brought together all the ideas shared during the consultation.

In response to interest from several Program Initiatives at IDRC, this paper presents an overview of the design, implementation and lessons learned from the consultation. It also draws out a set of guidelines for replicating this process, while improving on it. The intended readers are program staff who have an interest in organizing an electronic conference but have little or no experience in the area. It will inform potential future organizers of what one should consider before embarking on such a project:

- What is involved?
- What can and can't be achieved?
- Which areas require special attention? and;
- What are the issues that are raised by using such processes in international development research?

Although the guidelines and discussion describe and reflect on a process that integrated

¹ Project # 03269, co-sponsored by the People Land and Water (PLAW) and Alternative Approaches to Natural Resource Management in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINGA) Program Initiatives.

electronic and non-electronic events, there is considerably more emphasis in this paper on the specifics of the electronic conference than on those of the face-to-face events. Thus the guidelines presented will be relevant to Program Officers interested in organizing an electronic-only conference as well as those who are intending to combine electronic and non-electronic events. That said, it is important to mention that this focus is not an indication of the relative importance of the components to the overall process of the consultation. On the contrary, it will be argued that the face-to-face meetings added a great deal of value and that closer integration of the electronic and non-electronic events would benefit the process substantially.

II. Design

The consultative process was designed at a 3-day workshop attended by representatives of the organizing institutions. Decisions regarding specific objectives, participants, languages, logistics, and resources required, were articulated in a work plan. The consultation began roughly one month after the planning meeting. In this time conference announcements were sent out to potential participants and organizations, and the computer software was set up.

Conference Announcement

The conference announcement was sent to key people and institutions associated with work on livestock, environment and human welfare issues. This was distributed, via fax, E-mail and newsletter, primarily to the organizers' contacts in developing countries. It was also posted on a number of relevant Internet discussion lists such as DEVEL-L, SARD-NEWS etc. The text of the announcement identified the organizers, stated the rationale and objectives of the consultation, gave instructions on how to subscribe and who to contact in case of difficulty. It also suggested that people forward the announcement to others who would be interested.

Languages

English was the main language of the global electronic exchange although submissions in French and Spanish were also accepted. These were translated if they did not exceed three pages. Otherwise they were summarized in English. All the face-to-face meeting reports that were submitted in French or Spanish were translated to English.

Agenda

Substantive discussion in the global consultation lasted twelve weeks². The agenda was designed to loosely follow the outline of the multi-donor study. The first plenary session discussed the introductory chapter. After three weeks, the participants signed onto one or more of four different breakout groups, each of which addressed the subject of one of the subsequent chapters of the multi-donor study: grazing systems, mixed systems, industrial systems, and cross system issues. The breakout groups were held for five weeks during which participants also submitted and discussed case studies. Meanwhile as they became available, the reports of the roundtable discussions were posted onto the main list. On the ninth week of the conference the final plenary session was convened to discuss recommendations and conclusions. This lasted three weeks after which the conference was concluded and an evaluation questionnaire was sent to the participants.

² See Conference Agenda in Annex 2.

Three weeks after the electronic exchange, a week-long post-consultation meeting, to which some of the participants of the electronic exchange were invited, was held in the Netherlands.

Discussion Lists

The electronic exchange took the form of a series E-mail discussion groups. A total of six E-mail lists were used. The main list (LxE-L), to which all the participants were subscribed was used for the plenary discussions and for sending out instructions and other material from the manager and

moderator. Another four lists were later set up for the purpose of the breakout sessions. Participants chose to subscribe to the breakout groups that interested them.

The sixth list was set up for communication among the conference management team whose members were in different places around the world (Pennsylvania, Panama, Ottawa, Rome, Washington, Montevideo, Addis Ababa).

Figure 1 **Lists Used in the Electronic Conference**

1.	Main list- plenary sessions and instructions	LxE-L@mailserv.fao.org
2.	Discussion group for grazing systems	LxE-GRA@mailserv.fao.org
3.	Discussion group for mixed systems	LxE-MIX@mailserv.fao.org
4.	Discussion group for industrial systems	LxE-IND@mailserv.fao.org
5.	Discussion group for cross system issues	LxE-CSY@mailserv.fao.org
6.	Discussion group for conferencing team	LxE-Team@mailserv.fao.org

Conference Management

Before the conference began, the participants were given three weeks to subscribe which simply involved signing-on to the LxE-L list. Once subscribed, participants were asked to voluntarily submit a self introduction consisting of their name, the institution they are associated with, their address, telephone and facsimile numbers, their E-mail address, and a short (max. 5 lines) description of their work and interest in the subject matter. These were later compiled alphabetically and stored in the electronic archive (explained below).

The initial plenary session opened with a welcome message from each of the organizing institutions. Participants were then asked to prepare case studies (optionally). Guidelines for the case studies consisting of seven questions were posted on the main list. At the end of the opening plenary, the authors of the multi-donor study, summarized the comments and responded to most of them.

When the breakout groups began, the conference manager posted the appropriate chapter of the multi-donor study to the list that would discuss it. As case studies became available, they were also posted to the appropriate list and uploaded onto the archive. Once the breakout session came to an end, summaries of the discussions were posted on the main list.

Electronic Archives

An electronic archive was used to store much of the conference material. Many files that would only be of interest to some of the participants were filed there and were sent to participants upon request. Contents included self introductions, case studies, roundtable reports, and chapters of the multi-donor study (and summaries of each). To access files on the archive, participants sent an E-mail message to the archive with a simple command and the name(s) of the files desired. Examples are shown in figure 2. Files would then be sent from the archive directly to the participant by E-mail. A list of the all files available, and instructions on how they could be accessed were forwarded to the participants on the main list periodically. At the end of the electronic conference, the manager sent instructions to all the participants on the content of the archive and how these files could be retrieved. Archives of the electronic discussion were stored on a temporary html archive accessible via the World Wide Web. Like most discussion list html archives, messages could be identified by the subject line, which was hyper-linked to the message text.

Figure 2 Example of Commands Sent to the Electronic Archive

For a specific file:

```
SEND [LXE]FILENAME  
END
```

Wildcards such as an "*" or a "%" could be used to retrieve more than one file at a time. For example, to retrieve all the roundtable reports the following command would be used:

```
SEND [LXE]LXERT*  
END
```

Filenames

All the files in the electronic archive were given names that started with the prefix "LXE", to indicate that they related to the Livestock, Environment, Human Needs conference, and had a suffix: "INT" for self introduction; "DCH" for chapter of the multi-donor study; "RTB" for Roundtable Report; "CG" for Case Study on a grazing system; "CM" for Case Study on a mixed system; "CI" for Case Study on an industrial systems. In addition, each file had a number that could be looked up on the directory of the archive.

Summaries

Summaries were prepared for each of the chapters of the multi-donor study, the discussions in each of the breakout groups, the discussions of the case studies for each livestock system, and the final plenary session. In addition, a list of the all the case studies and roundtable reports was created, as well as a list of profiles. This made locating roundtable reports or case studies quicker and easier.

Face-to-face Meetings

The organization of the face-to-face meetings was left to ILRI, who took responsibility as to how they were organized, where they were to take place, and who was to participate. A set of guidelines for the local meetings including questions and discussion issues were established by the organizers in the design phase (see Annex 1).

Management Team

For the purpose of managing and moderating the electronic exchange, two consultants were hired to work full-time for the duration of the conference. In addition, the organizing institutions independently either hired or assigned personnel for organizing and reporting on the roundtable discussions, and for research support. A conferencing team was assembled to fulfill five functions:

1. Computer hardware and software management
2. Information management
3. People management (facilitator)
4. Subject matter management (moderator)
5. Overall conference coordination³

Each of these functions was assigned a lead person and one or two other persons to help. As stated above, the members of this management team were located in several different parts of the world and communicated among themselves using an E-mail list.

Budget

The total budget for the consultation was approximately \$ 270, 000 CDN. The specific breakdown for this is not available at the time of writing but roughly two thirds of the funds went towards organizing the face-to-face consultations and the other third into the electronic conference.

³ From the Work plan for the Electronic Conference on Balancing Livestock, The Environment and Human Needs, January 24, 1997.

III. Outcomes and Analysis

The main outcomes of the global consultation were the development of a number of policy recommendations, the identification of numerous research opportunities, and the formation of a network, or a community of interested and concerned people. In addition, the LxE consultation provided an experience from which the organizers and the participants learned a lot about the potential and the possible pitfalls of using ICTs in international development research. In spite of careful planning many things did not go as planned.

Participants

The number participants far exceeded the organizers' expectations. Whereas 1,045 people subscribed to the LxE conference, the largest conference INFORUM had had experience with only had 300-400 participants. Figure 3 shows the key conference statistics. In spite of this high subscription, only 147 people actively participated. Some signed off in the first weeks, however many others remained passive observers of the exchange. It is very difficult to know why so many did not participate, what their impressions of the consultation were, and what effect (if any) the consultation had on their perceptions and understandings of the subject matter. It is also difficult to place value on this inactive participation in terms of the long term effects of the conference.

Figure 3 Key Conference Statistics

1,045	participants, from 86 countries.
147	active participants (either sent in case studies and/or commented during discussions)
85	participants in the plenary discussions
33	participants in the grazing systems discussion
29	participants in the mixed systems discussion
7	participants in the industrial systems discussion
5	participants in the cross systems issues discussion
764	self introductions, from 83 countries submitted.
78	case studies, from 40 countries submitted.
18	roundtable reports, from 20 countries submitted

Information Exchange

The volume of information exchanged during the conference also far exceeded what was expected. A total of 764 people from 83 countries submitted self introductions, many of which surpassed the length limit prescribed. In addition, whereas it was not planned in the design of the conference, 78 case studies from 40 countries were sent in, many of which also exceeded the page limit.

As a result of the unexpected volume of information and the number of participants, both the management team and the conferees were overwhelmed. For the manager and the moderator of the conference this meant that they had to spend a lot more time than was foreseen on information management (summarizing, compiling, assigning file names and uploading onto the

archive, making profile and lists etc.). In absence of a preconceived approach, much time was spent cutting and pasting participants' submissions and opening and closing hundreds of E-mail messages to search for and keep track of key concepts. Several alternative approaches were considered but lack of time once the conference began, and a lack of accurate information on the alternatives impeded their adoption. A lot of time was also spent helping participants with difficulties accessing material on the archive and answering general questions. As both the manager and moderator struggled to keep up, the lines between their respective responsibilities faded, and the moderation of the substantive discussions was neglected.

In spite of the many efforts to manage information well, the majority of the completed evaluations indicated that there was too much information and not enough time to read and process it all⁴. Ironically many also highlighted the information exchanged as one of the most beneficial aspects of the conference.

E-mail Subject Lines

As the number of E-mails received by participants increased, subject lines became very important offering a quick way of categorizing the information. During the plenary sessions of the electronic conference, the subject line of messages from the participants (except for the case studies) consisted of the originators' name⁵, and one or two words that characterized the content of the message. For example, "LxE keynote comments: Smith" or "LxE Smith on Lapierre" were the forms used during the initial plenary session. These subject lines were not as helpful as they could have been if they were more representative of the content of the message.

During the breakout sessions, it was not necessary to put the originator's name on the subject line since these lists were unmoderated (i.e. the messages went straight from the originator to the list of subscribed participants). This allowed for more effective use of subject lines. For example in the grazing systems breakout group the following subject lines were typical: "GRA Mongolia hot spots", "GRA Neotropic grazing & extinction" (participants were instructed to begin their subject line with GRA to indicate it was a posting to the grazing breakout group). These subject lines allowed the users to decide if they were interested in the content, without having to open each message.

⁴ This could be for several reasons, one being the possibility that participants may have sent for all the material and subscribed to all the breakout groups instead of being selective (either because they were interested in everything, or because they misunderstood the instructions - which, we will never know).

⁵ The originator's name had to be put on the subject line because being a moderated list, all of the outgoing messages from the LxE listserve arrived in conferee's mail box as coming from one person (the manager) even though the messages originated from many different people. If the original author of the message could be retained as the originator, then the whole subject line could be used to characterize the message.

Substantive Discussions

For the most part, the substantive discussions in the electronic conference were unsatisfactory. This was mostly due to the lack of focus and conclusions of the discussions which in turn were at least partly due to weak moderation. The moderator could have driven the discussions toward the organizers' objectives by asking relevant questions throughout the conference. The broad subject matter of the conference itself, and the lack of additional focus offered by the breakout groups, also detracted from the quality of the substantive discussions.

Face-to-face Meetings

The face-to-face meetings took much more time to organize and report on than any of the sessions of the electronic exchange. Thus, by the time the reports were posted on the main list, the electronic conference was already near the end of the final plenary and there was no time to discuss them. As outlined in the guidelines for their organization, the face-to-face meetings were planned to be tightly integrated with the electronic exchange. They were to take place in two phases. The first phase was to consist of interviews with different stakeholders. Reports from these interviews would be posted on the listserver and discussed in the electronic conference. The second phase was to consist of a roundtable discussion among stakeholders who would be given a copy of the electronic discussion of their interviews. Reports from the roundtables would then be posted back onto the electronic exchange where they would be discussed and integrated into the conclusions and recommendations.

In practice, it was only feasible (given the time limitations) to produce and post one report from the local meetings to the electronic conference. Some of these included a report on both a set of interviews and a roundtable meeting, others only managed to do one of the two. Although this did allow for the inclusion of the views of local stakeholders in the process, it did not allow for the interaction between the electronic and non-electronic events as planned.

Interestingly, the nature of the discussions of the face-to-face meetings and that of the electronic exchange contrasted quite sharply. While the roundtables reflected on local conditions and concrete problems, the electronic conference took a much more abstract and global view of a range of issues (Li Pun et al, 1997: 14).

Post Consultation Meeting - Wageningen

A report of the global consultation was presented to the participants of the international meeting in Wageningen, The Netherlands. This meeting was generally successful in bringing a policy perspective to the dialogue although the global position paper that was to be elaborated at this meeting, with the input from the consultation, had already been published before it began. At present, the proceedings of the Wageningen meeting are still being written.

In the design of the consultation, this meeting was not intended to be integrated into the electronic process, nor to feed back into it. In practice however, there was an expectation by the conference participants that some of the results and conclusions would be brought back to the electronic exchange or to the participants once the conference was over.

Computer Virus

During the conference a computer virus was accidentally transported in an attached Microsoft Word document and was uploaded onto the archive. This caused problems for a number of participants. Although the virus was detectable and removable with the latest virus detection software available on Internet, many of the participants did not have immediate access to the latest anti-virus software.

Participants' Technical Difficulties

At the end of the conference many of the participants tried to unsubscribe from the main list. However, instead of sending their "unsubscribe" command to the server, they sent it to the list. For a week the participants who had remained subscribed to the list (LxE continued as an unmoderated list) got numerous E-mail messages with that command. This was annoying to many, although some found it quite humorous (see figure 4).

Figure 4 Participants' Reactions to UNSUBSCRIBE Messages

Dear colleagues and friends, be patient, there are left only a thousand people to unsubscribe. Regards

It is getting a bit tiresome but having been there..., I understand their frustration ...Some more self-evident instruction should be permanently attached to every posting. Obviously, the present method doesn't make allowances for the human condition.

SUBJECT LINE: Injury!

Damn - I've just dislocated my clicking finger from deleting the stream of "unsubscribe" which keeps appearing on my screen.

Is this list entirely populated by people who cannot be bothered to read instructions, and who have no experience of email lists?

Fulfillment of the Objectives

With regard to the objectives set at the beginning of the process, the consultation had mixed results. The first objective of the consultation was to incorporate the views of stakeholders into a position paper to be developed at the post-consultation meeting in the Netherlands. Although the views of stakeholders were welcomed and gathered effectively, they were not included in the position paper as it had already been published when that meeting began.

The consultation report shows the breakdown of countries and the disciplines of the participants

of the electronic conference: 75% of them were from the North, with more than half being North American. The breakdown of the specialization and areas of interest of these participants shows 45% being livestock scientists, 18% environmentalists, 16% agriculturalists, 15% social scientists, 3% farmers and 3% others (Li Pun et al. 1997: 6). The proportion of academics to farmers and pastoralists, and the absence of policy makers, entrepreneurs and business representatives in the electronic conference is notable, as is the over-representation of North Americans.

Two possible reasons are given in the report for the disparate involvement of people from the developing and developed world in the electronic conference (1997: 13). One is the inadequacy and high cost of electronic communication systems in most developing countries; the other is the lower importance given to environmental issues in developing countries. In addition to these, it must be noted that even in areas of the developing world where electronic communication systems do exist and are adequate, many people are unaccustomed to using them extensively in their day to day work (and to paying as much attention to what is happening in the “virtual” world as what is happening in the “real” world), and also may not have had the comfort level with the medium that is necessary to participate in an electronic conference. Moreover, in most parts of the developing world, face to face meetings are still a crucial part of social interaction and communication (something that seems to be losing importance in parts of the developed world, especially in North America).

The absence or under-representation of key stakeholders in the electronic conference is also important. A conscious effort was made in the design to reach a variety of stakeholders and interests. Moreover, announcements were deliberately sent through media other than E-mail to reach people that are not already subscribed to related listservers. The fact that the majority of conferees were academics attests to the need to personally invite, or to more specifically target certain stakeholders such as policy makers and business people that in spite of having access to electronic mail, would not ordinarily participate in such events. This might increase the likelihood that they would participate.

The profile of the participants to the local face-to-face meetings contrasted sharply with that of the electronic conference. In general these meetings were more successful in including a range of stakeholders from the developing world than was the electronic conference. All of the 18 local meetings took place in the developing world and all of them included the views of farmers and/or pastoralists and other stakeholders (policy makers and entrepreneurs) that were not very “visible” in the electronic exchange.

The most evident reason for this contrast is that in organizing the local meetings, the convener was expected to identify and personally contact relevant participants whereas for the electronic conference a notice was sent out and little or no “active recruitment” took place. In addition, in the guidelines for the local consultations it is clearly stated that the participants should be a fair sample of each kind of stakeholders and that particular attention should be paid to include farmers, producers, and local NGOs. This should be taken into consideration in the design phase

of future electronic consultations.

Given the different profiles of the participants, and the aforementioned difference in the tone of the discussions in the electronic conference and the local meetings, it can be said that the electronic conference, on its own, was not successful in bringing out the views of a variety of stakeholders from the developing world. It was mostly the local consultation reports that brought this objective to fruition. This stresses the importance of the face-to-face meetings in the consultation as well as the need to refine the methods of integrating electronic and non-electronic events.

The second objective of the LxE consultation was the identification of policy, research and development strategies. As the proceedings of the Wageningen meeting at which these were to be finalized are being still completed, it is still too early to determine whether a significant number of policy and development strategies were identified. However, many research issues and opportunities were identified. The role of ICTs in this process is evident as it was the exchange of ideas and the concerted reflection on the challenges at hand that stimulated their creation or articulation. It is important however to note the distinct contribution of the face-to-face meetings as they identified important research issues that were not identified in the electronic conference. Thus, as with the first objective, the combination of electronic and non-electronic events was ideal.

The third objective of the consultation was the identification of common interests among participants which could lead to future cooperation on the subject matter. The electronic conference was extremely effective in providing a forum for the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience, and in establishing a network of people who are interested, knowledgeable and concerned about the subject matter. The level of interest among the participants of the electronic conference in continuing the exchange as an unmoderated list, and the participants' response to the self introductions are proof of this. It is harder to know whether the face-to-face meetings were as successful in this respect because we do not know if the meetings of stakeholders held in the different countries lead to any further cooperation among the participants nor even the extent to which the stakeholders agreed on common interests.

Whether or not the networks formed and the common interests identified will lead to concrete action that will have a relatively direct impact on the interactions of livestock, human needs and the environment has yet to be seen. As of yet, to our knowledge, the only action that has emerged is the creation of an international course on livestock and environment interactions that will be offered jointly by the International Agricultural Centre (IAC) and Wageningen Agricultural University (March 28 - April; 11, 1998). Would this course have been developed if the LxE conference had not taken place ? In absence of a mechanism and a formal structure for monitoring this, it will be difficult to know about all the concrete actions that have been taken, and the extent to which they were induced by the LxE consultation and the networks it helped form.

The electronic conference achieved more than the stated objectives. It raised public awareness of the issues and challenges discussed. Several of the participant evaluations mentioned that they had learned a lot about problems and solutions in other parts of the world. Others mentioned that they were new to the field and had learnt a lot as observers of the conference. The electronic conference also raised awareness of the potential applications of ICTs⁶ for linking people and institutions and for facilitating communication among them. It also provided an opportunity for people who were previously unfamiliar with ICTs, to experience them first hand. These things are hard to quantify, but are positive nonetheless.

Cost Effectiveness

One way of estimating the cost effectiveness of the electronic conference is by looking at the cost of alternatives. If the LxE consultation would have been an international (in-person) conference rather than an electronic conference, it may have cost approximately \$3,500 per participant. In most international conferences the sponsors or organizers pay for, or subsidize the attendance of some of the participants. If the organizers of the LxE consultation had dedicated all the funds for the consultation to per diems⁷ only around 77 people would have been able to participate. This means that in order to have even a tenth of the number of participants as there was in the LxE consultation, many of the participants would have had to pay their way, which would mean that the conference would be prohibitively expensive for many potential participants from the developing world. When asked about the costs of their participation in the electronic conference, those who responded to the evaluation questionnaire indicated that the financial costs (to themselves or their organizations) of their participation were quite low. It is safe therefore to say that many of the 1,045 participants to the electronic conference would not have attended had it been a “real life” conference rather than an electronic conference.

Participant Evaluations

As the electronic conference came to an end, the management team decided that it would be useful to get the participants’ feedback on the process. An evaluation questionnaire consisting of a set of true and false questions and three open-ended questions was created and sent to all the participants. Only 124 participants responded however. As this was only a small, self-selected group of participants, and as the questionnaire was not distributed to participants of the face-to-face meetings, the results hardly constitute a full participant evaluation of the process. They did

⁶ One conferee, in his evaluation questionnaire thanked the conference management team saying that he was going to use the general idea and structure of the conference as a model for an electronic conference he would organize on a more specific livestock related issue in his region.

⁷ This is highly unlikely since there are usually many other expenses associated with a real life international conference.

however provide some interesting feedback to the organizers.

The majority of the respondents thought that the conference had been successful in meeting its objectives, especially that of providing the opportunity to share opinions. The objective that fewest respondents felt had been fulfilled was that of identifying future development and research strategies, followed by that of elaborating policy strategies. This is possibly because these objectives were only intended to be fulfilled in the post consultation meeting with input of the electronic conference. The evaluation process was finished before the post consultation meeting in Wageningen began.

In general the respondents were satisfied with the conference procedure, with the amount of time allocated to the different sessions, and with the minimal costs incurred by themselves and/or their institutions to participate. Many highlighted the opportunity to share and exchange information with people from all over the world, and the possibility of participating in a world event without leaving their offices. The most frequent drawbacks mentioned were the volume of information received, the lack of participation of a variety of stakeholders (especially the mere absence of farmers, environmentalists and policy makers), the lack of focus of some of the discussions, and the neglect of some themes or subjects. In spite of these drawbacks many of the respondents commended the initiative and were anxious to participate in a similar event in the future. The complete results of the evaluation questionnaire are presented in Annex 4.

Enthusiasm for follow-up

Among the recommendations that were presented in the final plenary session, was the idea of continuing the electronic exchange beyond the termination of the conference. Several options were considered including establishing an electronic forum consisting of a set of integrated electronic services, an electronic network of institutions that work on relevant issues, or a virtual centre. Finally it was decided that for the time being the LxE electronic conference would continue as an unmoderated list. Discussions continued for a couple of months and then died down.

IV. Lessons Learned

The management team learned a lot in the process of implementing the LxE consultation. This section describes some of the lessons.

General Lessons drawn from the LxE Consultation

- Electronic conferences and processes have a lot of potential in international development research, especially when combined with non-electronic events.
- The face-to-face meetings added a lot of value to the outcomes. A conscious effort needs to be put into ensuring the equal representation and participation of key stakeholders in these processes - since many do not have access to information and communication technologies, this means the tight integration of electronic and non-electronic events.
- For the organizers and the managers, this process was a major undertaking and was very costly both financially and time wise.
- For the participants, the electronic conference allowed the participation, at a relatively low cost, of as many people as wanted to, provided they had E-mail connections.
- It was easier to exchange information than to carry out in depth discussions in the electronic conference. Thus, it was easier to compile research opportunities than to have a conclusive discussions on one aspect of the theme.
- When a consultation is to be part of the process of writing a global position paper, it should be incorporated into the project at its inception rather than in the middle or at the end.
- Much time can be saved by selecting discussion list software that meets the needs of the organizers.

Given these lessons, it is recommendable that some thought be given, before undertaking a global consultation, to whether it is necessary and efficient to replicate this type of process. The decision, to a great extent, will depend on the objectives that are to be fulfilled and the amount of time and money available for their fulfillment. If the main objective is to include as many people as possible, it may be worthwhile to have an electronic conference; whereas if the main objective is to have as many stakeholders as possible participating on an equal basis, it may be more effective to have more roundtable discussions and a smaller electronic conference. It is worth remembering here that the roundtables while being the more expensive component of the consultation, were more effective in bringing out the views of a variety of stakeholders from the South. On the other hand, the electronic conference and the post consultation meeting were more effective in bringing a global perspective and a policy tone to the deliberations.

V. Guidelines

If and when it is decided that a consultation is appropriate to fulfill the objectives at hand, the following questions and guidelines will be helpful in the planning and implementation of the process.

Guidelines for Designing a Global Consultation

These eleven questions are based on the questions posed by the conference manager in the planning meeting for the LxE conference. They have been modified here in light of the lessons learned.

1. What are the objectives and how will their fulfillment be known (and measured) ?
2. What will be the relationship between the electronic conference and the face-to-face meetings before, during, or after the electronic conference ?
3. Who should be invited and how should invitations be distributed ?
4. Which language or languages should be used ?
5. What format should be used for the electronic exchange ? (for example: task force, workshop, symposia, debate, distance learning, etc.)
6. Where (on which computer?) should the conference be set up ?
7. How long should the conference last and how should the agenda be structured ?
8. Will print or electronic proceedings of the consultation be published ?
9. What type of personnel support is needed to implement the electronic-conference and who will be responsible for what ?
10. How much will it cost in non-personnel time, in personnel time? Are there more cost-effective ways of reaching our objectives ?
11. How will this process be evaluated by the organizers and by the participants. What type of questions should be asked ?

Guidelines for Information Management

Box 1 summarizes guidelines for information management. They are explained below.

1. Plan ways of managing and using the information obtained before beginning the electronic conference.
2. Give the participants clear and specific instructions as to what is being requested of them and what format you want to receive it in.
3. Be clear from the beginning: What will be published ? What will not ?
4. Take precautions against computer viruses.

Box 1

1. Plan ways of managing and using the information obtained before beginning the electronic conference.

In their evaluations, many of the participants stressed the value of the information that was exchanged in the conference. They referred to the self introductions, the case studies, other participants' submissions and the local consultation reports. The main lesson learned in the LxE conference with regard to information management is the need to address, in the design phase, the potential uses of the information that will be gathered throughout the process, and the ways in which this usage by both the conference organizers and the participants can be facilitated.

This is a different issue from the ways of storing the information which, as stated above, was resolved by the use of archives. One idea was to have material going directly into databases or another type of electronic document management system. This was especially appealing for the self introductions that are a valuable source of contacts for future events and initiatives, but is equally valid for the other submissions that presently are stored as a number of separate files that are extremely time consuming to handle individually.

This guideline also applies for the conference statistics that are compiled. For the LxE consultation it could have been useful to know how many people unsubscribed from the conference; if these people belong to one stakeholder group in particular, or have any other common characteristic; who were the 147 people who actively participated in the conference; did *they* belong to one stakeholder group in particular, or have any other common characteristic.

2. Give the participants clear and specific instructions as to what is being requested of them and what format you want to receive it in.

This method greatly facilitated the work of both the manager and the moderator in compiling and archiving the participants' input to the conference. In the instructions for the self introductions it is important to spell-out exactly how the name is to be submitted (IE first name first, second second or vice-versa). This is because it is sometimes difficult with unfamiliar names, to know which is the first name and which the second. It is also recommendable to ask, in the self introductions, that the participant (optionally) specify their gender.

In the LxE conference, whenever information was requested from the participants, it was requested in a specific format so that the responses would be easy to compile, compare and to refer to. It is also important to outline and enforce (to the extent possible) the maximum length of submissions. This was done for the self introductions, the case studies, the roundtable reports, and the evaluations.

3. Be clear from the beginning: What will be published, what will not ?

In "real life" conferences the comments and verbal interactions among participants are usually not recorded and if people are quoted it is usually only with their knowledge and consent. This raises a question in an electronic conference where it is possible to save, and to identify the author of every comment. How formal do participants want their comments in an electronic conference to be ? This will evidently vary from participant to participant. Inquiries about this from a number of the LxE conferees indicates that in general, it is important to participants that it be clear what is on the record what is not; where will the discussions be stored; and to whom will they be accessible once the conference is finished? A policy statement (like a set of ground rules) could be included with the welcome message sent out in the beginning.

4. Take precautions against computer viruses.

Computer viruses are very easy to spread over E mail, and not always as easy to get rid of. Several measures can be taken to prevent the spread of viruses through an electronic conference. A very effective, but expensive measure is to acquire anti-virus software for mail servers⁸. Other measures include avoiding the transfer of E-mail attachments in the conference. This could be the easiest way although it could inconvenience participants who would like to send large blocks of text as attachments. A precaution that should be taken regardless of other measures is that the conference manager and moderator should have the latest virus detection software and should

⁸ This kind of software is still relatively new on the market and is usually part of a server E-mail security package. Presently the asking price for a server E-mail security package for a 50 user network is approximately US\$ 80, for a 200 user network US \$ 3400. Many different software companies are developing this type of software.

scan all the files that they upload onto the archive.

Guidelines for Subject Matter Management

Box 2 summarizes some guidelines for subject matter management. They are explained below.

1. The role of moderator is essential in an E-mail conference.
2. Breakout sessions have to be significantly different from one another.

Box 2

1. The role of moderator is essential in an E-mail conference.

The moderator of an electronic conference is responsible for stimulating discussion and maintaining a focus while keeping the objectives of the process in mind. Without effective moderation, electronic conferences have a tendency to turn into fora for information exchange rather than discussion. Ideally they should be both. However, discussion does not come as naturally in an electronic setting as it does in an in-person setting and thus should be spurred by the moderator.

The moderator also has the task of building consensus and driving the different sessions of the conference toward some conclusions. This is particularly important when the subject matter of the conference is as broad and open ended as that of the LxE consultation. In order to be able to do this effectively, the moderator needs to build a rapport with the conferees (which is not easy in the absence of non-verbal communication) and to have a certain level of comfort with the subject matter.

Another important task of the moderator is to build a sense of community among the participants at the beginning of the conference. In this sense, “real life” group processes benefit substantially from opening ceremonies, receptions and other social occasions in which the participants can meet one another and get a sense of who their colleagues are. In an electronic conference it is more tricky to build this sense of community, because the participants have no way of knowing who else is part of the conference and are often initially reluctant to make a statement of opinion “in the dark” (pers. comm. Hart). It is here where the role of the moderator can make a great difference.

2. Breakout sessions have to be significantly different from one another.

Two possible reasons why people subscribed to more than one of the breakout groups are that

participants did not feel comfortable with the categories and/or the breakout groups did not provide enough further focus to the overall topic of the conference. Ideally, breakout sessions should be on subjects sufficiently different to one another so that people do not feel it is necessary to subscribe to more than one.

Guidelines for the Integration of Electronic and Non-Electronic Events

Box 3 summarizes some guidelines from the integration of roundtable discussions and the electronic conference. They are discussed below.

1. Timing and coordination between electronic and non-electronic events is critical.
2. The type of discussions at the local meetings and interviews differed from those in the electronic exchange and the post consultation meeting.

Box 3

1. Timing and coordination between electronic and non-electronic events is critical.

It is not easy to coordinate and integrate face-to-face meetings with an electronic exchange. Ideally (even with only one report from each of the local meetings), 2 or 3 weeks should have been allowed for analysis of the roundtable reports so that they could have served as input into the final recommendations. For this the local meetings needed more time. This would either mean getting them started before the beginning of the electronic conference, or extending the agenda of the electronic conference to allow time (before the final plenary) specifically for the discussion of the local meeting reports.

2. The type of discussions at the local meetings and interviews differed from those in the electronic exchange and the post consultation meeting.

These differences between the three types of events that constituted the LxE consultation was very positive in a process that was intended to bring in a variety of views and approaches. This being said, it is also important to note that because of this, the integration of electronic and non-electronic events is not automatic. An effort has to be put specifically into this task rather than think it will happen alone.

Guidelines for a Conference Management Team

Box 4 summarizes the guidelines with regard to the conference management team. They are discussed below.

1. It is important to have some flexibility in hiring more people to work on the electronic conference if necessary.
2. The roles and responsibilities of the different members of the management team need to be clear at the outset.
3. Organizers and sponsors need to have time to dedicate to the conference.
4. It is essential that one person or group have responsibility for the overall coordination of all the parts of the process.

Box 4

1. **It is important to have some flexibility in hiring more people to work on the electronic conference if necessary.**

It is very difficult to estimate in advance, the number of participants and the volume of information that will be exchanged in an electronic conference. For this reason, it is important to have some flexibility in hiring more people if necessary, to work on any of the aspects of the conference (be it software/hardware management, moderation, information management etc.). If this is not possible, participation should be limited to a certain number.

2. **The roles and responsibilities of the different members of the management team have to be clear at the outset.**

The roles and responsibilities of the moderator, the manager and other management team members have to be clear at the outset. The management team and the functions they fulfill (especially the conference manager and the moderator) during the conference are very important in guiding the discussion and in ensuring that the conference stays on track, and that it fulfills the objectives. There will be times during the electronic conference however when the lines between some of the functions will be unclear (for example information management v/s subject matter management). When this happens, essential tasks can be neglected, compromising the outcomes of the conference. For this reason, the roles have to be well defined and those who accept responsibility for one or more of the functions must have a clear understanding of what this

involves and how to do it (Personal Comm. R. Hart).

3. Organizers and sponsors need to have time to dedicate to the conference.

Apart from hired personnel support, the members of the management team, especially the organizers and sponsors, need to have time to dedicate to the conference. The participation of the organizers and sponsors in giving feedback to the comments, in asking questions that will drive the discussion toward their objectives, or simply to inspire the participants' trust and sense of purpose in the process is extremely important.

It is also important that the management team, including the organizers and sponsors have some time at strategic points in the conference time line to evaluate the process and determine the extent to which their objectives are being met. This way, if something can be done to improve the outcome, it can be addressed before the conference comes to an end.

4. It is essential that one person (or a couple) have responsibility for the overall coordination of all the parts of the process.

A final point regarding the management team and the respective roles is that it is very important, in a process that is as big and complex as the LxE consultation, that one person, or a group of people actively coordinate the whole process, to bring all the pieces together (the roundtables, case studies, electronic conference, final meeting) and to make sure that the objectives and results of all the pieces are the same or compatible. It is also important that the participants to the different sections are aware that they are part of a larger process of consultations. This is an area in which the LxE consultation could have benefited more.

VII. Conclusions

This paper has discussed the planning, implementation and lessons learned for the Global Consultation on Balancing Livestock, Environment and Human Needs. The first section described the design of the consultation. This is followed by a description of, and a reflection on the outcomes and then the lessons learned from the process.

The main lessons learned from the LxE consultation are: that electronic processes have a lot of potential, especially when combined with non-electronic events; that a conscious effort needs to be put into ensuring the equal representation and participation stakeholders who do not have access to information and communication technologies; that it is expensive and time consuming for the organizers but relatively inexpensive for participants who had E-mail connections; that it was easier to exchange information than to carry out in depth discussions in the electronic conference; that consultations should be incorporated into the project at the planning stages, not in the middle or at the end, and finally, that software for discussion lists has to be selected in view of the organizers' needs and objectives.

The guidelines for organizing future electronic conferences are presented in four categories: information management, subject matter management, integration of electronic and non-electronic events, and conference management team. With regard to information management it was noted that it is essential to find methods of managing the information generated in an electronic conference. Also, it should be clear to participants from the beginning, what format the information they provide should be in, and which parts of what they submit will be published, and or made available, and to whom. Very importantly, the ease with which computer viruses can be spread was noted.

Subject matter management was another of the main categories of guidelines. The main lessons were that the role of the moderator is essential in facilitating and focusing the discussions and in driving the participants toward some consensus. This is especially the case when the subject matter of a consultation is as broad as that of the LxE consultation. Also, it is very important that breakout sessions be designated with sufficiently different topics to one another so that conferees do not feel the need to sign onto more than one.

The idea of integrating electronic and non-electronic events was one of the features that made the LxE conference innovative. In the implementation of the work plan however, it was learned that getting the electronic and non-electronic components to interact needs work. This is because the tone of the discussions in one may differ from that in the other and because face-to-face meetings take much longer to organize and report on than do any of the sessions of the electronic conference. It was suggested here that a conscious effort be put into integrating electronic and non electronic events possibly by assigning that responsibility to a person (or a few people) on the management team.

The final section under which guidelines were drawn concerns the management team. It was stressed that in organizing such an event (with an unpredictable number of participants), flexibility is needed in hiring more people. Also, the respective roles and responsibilities of the people on the management team should be clear. Finally, the organizers and sponsors of the event should have some time to dedicate to the process.

In conclusion, the LxE consultation demonstrated the potential of using information and communication technologies in international development research and policy making. The thought of linking more than 1000 people in almost 100 countries, with a common interest, and having them discuss issues that are not easily resolved, is truly impressive. It has been argued here that ICTs can be a very powerful tool in drawing public input and reaction to policy deliberations. They are only effective however to the extent that all stakeholders have access to and are comfortable with the technology. The use of an electronic conference for consultations, without parallel use and integration of face-to-face meetings can thus be very undemocratic. It is in this way that the mismanagement and misallocation of ICTs can be a hindrance rather than a tool for development.

It was also mentioned that the electronic conference formed a community or an informal network around the subject matter of the consultation. Most of the members of this community had a chance to evaluate the process and will have access to the results of the consultation once these are ready. This is important and necessary. Those who contributed to the local meetings however were not able to participate in the evaluation and (most probably) will not get any feedback to their input to the process. Thus they are not part of the community that was formed, although they played an integral role in its formation and initial functioning. This shows how ICTs while reducing barriers among those who are connected, can increase the barriers among those who are connected and those who are not. This is an issue that should be considered in the future organization of similar events so that as much effort as possible can be put into integrating the non-electronic elements of the process to the electronic elements.

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ANNEX 1

GUIDELINES FOR THE LOCAL CONSULTATIONS⁹

a) What is the local consultation?

The local consultation is a component of the global conference on livestock and the environment, aimed at obtaining the views and perceptions of stakeholders from developing countries who might not have access to electronic mail. A stakeholder is any individual or group in society which have an interest, dependency, relationship or responsibility on livestock production and consumption and natural resources management. By this definition, stakeholders include livestock farmers, consumers, livestock researchers, agricultural development agents, natural resources managers, agricultural economists, extension agents, environmental advocates, and policy makers.

b) *Who should be included in the local consultation?*

In order to obtain a fairly representative set of opinions and perceptions from stakeholders, a fair sample of each kind of stakeholders should be included in the local consultation. Particular care should be paid to the participation of farmers and producers as their number and diversity is larger than other stakeholders. Including grassroots farmers groups representatives (cooperatives, local and national farmers associations) rather than individuals will be appropriate. Concerning consumers and environmental advocates, particular attention should be paid to local NGO's. Researchers and policy makers generally pertain to government institutions such as NARS, Universities, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Planning Ministry.

c) *Activities to be conducted by the local convener.*

There are two activities to be conducted by the local convenor. One is a series of interviews and the other is a roundtable. The interviews to different stakeholders should be conducted during the first two weeks of the electronic conference which will start on March 10. The interviews can be conducted individually or in small groups of one particular type of stakeholders. Questions to be asked during the interviews are given below. The roundtable should be convened during the 9th or the 10th week of the electronic conference which will last for 12 weeks. Expected participants

⁹ from Li Pun et al. 1997

in the roundtable are representatives of each type of stakeholder. The roundtables should include no more than 20 participants. The aim of the roundtable is to examine the particular views of different types of stakeholders concerning the issues being discussed in the electronic conference and to reach some conclusions. These issues, which are the basis of the questions asked during the interviews are described below.

Following each one of the activities (the interviews and the roundtable), the convenor has to produce a summary of the results and conclusions and input these summaries into the global electronic conference. Thus, the local convenor has to subscribe to the electronic conference as any other individual participants. Instructions for subscribing to the electronic conference are provided below.

In organizing the interviews and the roundtable, the local convenor should identify and contact relevant participants.

d) Questions to be asked and discussed during the interviews, roundtables and the electronic conference.

There is a set of three main issues (state of natural resources; driving forces for livestock-environment interactions; and, responses of society), for the global discussion. Each one of this issues poses a number of specific questions to be asked and discussed during the interviews, roundtables and the electronic conference. As for the interviews and roundtables, the aim is to obtain qualified opinions and perceptions from stakeholders.

The issues and questions to be asked and discussed are:

1. What are the most important national problems related to livestock production and natural resources enhancement and degradation: nutrient cycling and soil improvement, biodiversity enhancement, savings of fossil fuels, deforestation, soil degradation (erosion, compaction), biodiversity loss, involution (reduced soil fertility due to negative nutrient balance) of mixed systems, or/and animal-waste contamination?.
2. What is the state or condition of natural resources (soil, water, vegetation, air and biodiversity) and what are the most important recent trends in your local area?.
- 2.1. What indicators do you use for monitoring these changes in the state of the above mentioned natural resources?.
3. What are the driving forces and pressures (e.g., incentives, land tenure or institutional policies, human population pressure, consumption patterns, climate, human values, and technologies) leading to the identified problems?.
- 3.1. What are the driving forces in your area, which define the effects of livestock on the natural resource base? Do you have information to quantify that causal relationship?.
- 3.2. What are the most critical livestock-environmental interactions; positive and negative?.
- 3.3. How do land tenure, prices of inputs and outputs, institutions and regulations or any other policies affect these effects on the resource base?.

- 3.4. What effects on the local environment are due to factors in other environments?
4. What are the bio-physical and socio-economic impacts of livestock systems (grazing, mixed, and industrial or land-detached systems) in your particular ecoregion?
 - 4.1. What is the value placed by the local community on different livestock outputs and services such as meat, milk, fertilizer, animal traction, social prestige and assets building?
 - 4.2. Does the local community believe that livestock provides the social, economic and financial benefits expected of them and if so, are they better or worse than in the past?
5. What are the responses of stakeholders and society at large to environmental changes?
 - 5.1. What are the farmers' time horizons and goals and how are they responding to pressures on the environment?
 - 5.2. What are the responses of farmers and other stakeholders on the trends in the state of the natural resource base? What technologies are being used which can mitigate the negative effects and which enhance the positive effects of livestock on natural resources?
 - 5.3. What policies and regulations are used to promote the above mentioned technologies and what is the effect of those policies?
 - 5.4. Are environmental issues considered in policy formulation?
 - 5.5. How important are other groups in defining the policies affecting livestock-environment interactions. Who are they?. How constructive are those interventions?.
 - 5.6. What are the policy linkages with population pressure?
6. What is the effect of those responses on the rate and direction of environmental change and human needs satisfaction?
 - 6.1. What are the current policy issues related to the pressures?
7. How do you see demand trends for livestock products in your country (internal consumption and export) and which production system would you see have the largest potential to satisfy any increase?.
8. What should we do and what can be done (research priorities, policies, development programs, production systems to be encouraged and discouraged) in order to balance livestock, environment, and human needs in your local area?.

The above questions and the corresponding discussions to be held during the global consultation follow the conceptual analytical framework of Pressure-State-Response (PSR) which is based on the environmental model developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This conceptual framework helps to identify and understand the forces, processes, effects, and societal responses involved in livestock and environment interactions.

ANNEX 2

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Weeks 1-3; (3 weeks)

- Participant subscriptions
- Participant self-introductions
- Welcome messages from the organizers and sponsors
- Presentation of the agenda
- Distribution of the keynote paper
- Plenary / comments on keynote paper

Weeks 4-8; (5 weeks)

- Breakout sessions
- Submission of participant's Case Studies
- Discussion of relevant Multi-Donor Study chapters
- System specific discussions

Weeks 9-11; (3 weeks)

- Final Plenary / Discussion of recommendations, follow-up activities and options

Week 12; (1 week)

- General Summary / Conclusions
- Closing remarks
- Distribution of evaluation forms

ANNEX 3

EXAMPLE OF GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANT SUBMISSIONS

PARTICIPANT SELF INTRODUCTIONS

NAME:
INSTITUTION:
ADDRESS:
TEL:
FAX:
E MAIL:

Short (5 lines maximum) description of background, current work, and interests.

CASE STUDIES

The Case Studies were written in response to 7 questions in which people were asked to describe:

1. The Livestock Systems
 2. Environmental Degradation
 3. Underlying Causes of Degradation
 4. Impact of Degradation on People
 5. Response of People to the Impact
 6. Attempts to Balance Livestock, Environment, and Needs
 7. Future Trends
-

ANNEX 4

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

SECTION A: Evaluation of the Conference's Success in Reaching the Conference Objectives.

Summary

Each of the seven statements in this section were deemed true by the majority of the respondents. Undoubtedly the conference was seen as having been successful in meeting its objectives, especially that of providing the opportunity to share opinions. The statements that received the greatest number of negative (false) counts were those relating to the identification of future development and research strategies, followed by the ones relating to the identification of policy strategies.

Results

Question 1. The conference was successful in providing an opportunity for many people and institutions to share their opinions.

120 True 2 False 2 Not Sure 0 No Answer

Question 2. The conference encouraged diverse perspectives from animal scientists, environmentalists, etc. and was not dominated by one perspective

105 True 17 False 1 Not Sure 1 No Answer

Question 3 The conference made progress in identifying future policy strategies.

95 True 23 False 4 Not Sure 2 No Answer

Question 4. The conference made progress in identifying future research strategies.

90 True 27 False 5 Not Sure 2 No Answer

Question 5. The conference made progress in identifying future development strategies.

81 True 37 False 3 Not Sure 3 No Answer

Question 6. Significant progress was made in identifying areas of common interests.

108 True 13 False 1 Not Sure 2 No Answer

Question 7. Significant progress was made in identifying possible mechanisms to increase future collaboration

105 True 14 False 4 Not Sure 1 No Answer

SECTION B: Evaluation of The Cost Effectiveness of This Conference.

Summary

Most of the respondents agreed that the conference was cost effective. Most of the statements were deemed true, with the notable exception of # 15 which says that “an important benefit will be increased donor support for future collaborative initiatives”. Other statements that received considerably less support than the others were numbers 12 and 14 regarding the usefulness of the general discussion, and the effectiveness of the conference in providing valuable contacts to the participants for future exchange. All in all however, the response to this section was positive.

Results

Question 8. My (or my institution's) primary costs for my participation in this conference, was for my time; my communications costs were relatively low compared to the cost of my time.

109 True 13 False 0 Not Sure 2 No Answer

Question 9. I found the self introduction information sent in by other conferees to be useful.

111 True 10 False 1 Not Sure 2 No Answer

Question 10. I found the chapter summaries from the multi-donor study to be useful.

113 True 5 False 1 Not Sure 5 No Answer

Question 11. I found the grazing, mixed, and industrial system case studies to be useful.

106 True 13 False 1 Not Sure 4 No Answer

Question 12. I found the general discussion among the different conferees to be useful.

92 True 28 False 0 Not Sure 4 No Answer

Question 13. An important benefit of this conference was the dissemination of information.

114 True 8 False 0 Not Sure 2 No Answer

Question 14. An important benefit of this conference to me will be the future exchange with colleagues I have contacted via this conference.

85 True 29 False 6 Not Sure 4 No Answer

Question 15. An important benefit of this conference will be increased donor support for future collaborative initiatives.

48 True 50 False 18 Not Sure 8 No Answer

Question 16. The benefits I received from participating in this conference exceeded my costs.

103 True 14 False 5 Not Sure 2 No Answer

SECTION C: Evaluation of The Conferencing Process in Order to Improve Future Conferences.

Summary

The responses to the statements in this section were somewhat divided. The first three, relating to the effectiveness of the manager and the moderator were overwhelmingly positive (This is confirmed by participants' comments under question # 25).

The next three questions related to how much time the different sessions and plenaries of the conference should have taken. The majority of the answers indicated that the respondents did not think that less time should have been dedicated to the initial plenary, the breakout sessions, and to the final plenary. There was more support for the final plenary than for the others however.

Results

Question 17. The Conference Manager did a good job using the E-mail Lists and Archive to manage the conference information.

126 True 0 False 0 Not Sure 0 No Answer

Question 18. The Conference Manager did a good job helping conferees and encouraging participation.

122 True 2 False 0 Not Sure 0 No Answer

Question 19. The subject matter moderators did a good job starting, leading, and moderating the discussions.

111 True 6 False 1 Not Sure 6 No Answer

Question 20. Less time should have been spent on the initial plenary discussion of issues, and more time on the other two phases.

32 True 79 False 2 Not Sure 11 No Answer

Question 21. Less time should have been spent on the 4 breakout sessions and more time on the other two phases.

35 True 72 False 3 Not Sure 14 No Answer

Question 22. Less time should have been spent on the final plenary recommendations and more time on the other two phases.

14 True 100 False 2 Not Sure 8 No Answer

SECTION D: A Few Open Questions.

Question 23. A. What do you think was the most beneficial aspect of this conference either to you or others ?

B. What was its greatest shortcoming?

A.

The opportunity to share and exchange different ideas, opinions, and knowledge with people from all over the world, was the greatest benefit that most of the participants drew attention to. Some were happy to have been in contact with people in their own disciplines, while others felt enriched by having interacted with people from different disciplines and backgrounds, and with people who would not ordinarily be able to attend the conference.

Another great benefit that participants highlighted was the chance to learn about livestock related issues and situations around the world, and about ways in which these are being addressed. For some -who were interested but not very familiar with livestock systems before hand- the conference provided an excellent introduction to the issues and subject matter. For others -who were engaged in research or in studying related subject matters- it was an excellent “learning environment” and forum for encouragement and support of research ideas. One respondent mentioned that it was very enlightening for him/her to see how the LxE problem varies among regions of the world. Others valued the opportunity to amass the material, including “expert information in a synthesized format” for future reference.

A few participants mentioned the convenience of participating in this world event without leaving their offices (although this was more often listed as a shortcoming because of time constraints and interference with daily tasks). One mentioned the very low costs involved in participating as opposed to the often prohibitive costs associated with “real life” conferences. A few others mentioned the opportunities for networking, and the knowledge that the theme of the conference is of concern to so many people and institutions.

Finally, a number of the respondents interpreted the question as asking Which was the most beneficial part of the conference ? The responses included the self introductions; the summaries; and the short comments identifying issues.

B.

There were three main shortcomings identified by the respondents. One was the large amounts of material coming from the conference, another was the lack of participation of a variety of stakeholders, yet another was the fragmentation and lack of focus of some of the discussions. Some highlighted the absence of discussion on certain issues (these will be summarized under number 24).

A great number of the responses indicated that there were too many E-mail messages, too much information to digest and respond to, and generally not enough time to adequately participate in the electronic exchange. Many argued that this inhibited their participation and that they would have liked to be more active participants. Some indicated that spending more time on the conference may have meant spending less time in the field, the lab or other daily tasks which was hard to do. A few had to travel during the duration of the conference.

An equally salient shortcoming as the volume of material, in the view of the participants, was the unequal representation of diverse stakeholders, disciplines, and points of view in the conference. Among the “forgotten actors” mentioned are farmers and peasants, the “grass-roots”, environmentalists, industry, and national research institutions. Many of the entries allude to the lack of access to electronic media as being a major cause of the lop-sided representation in the conference. The unilingual (English) nature of the conference was also an issue.

A few people thought that the conference was dominated by livestock managers and experts, animal scientists, and technical people. It was also pointed out that the conference may have benefited from the perspectives of stakeholders that are stronger critics of the livestock industry. Some responses pointed out that active participation was limited to only a small number of the total subscribers and wondered why.

Many respondents argued that the conference was not focused enough. This, in one’s view, lead to people not knowing “where to start and ending up commenting on very local specific circumstances at great length” to the detriment of a generalized discussion. Another response mentioned that the broadness of the subject inhibited in-depth debate about anything.

A few responses argued that no consensus was reached within the conference and that nothing was resolved nor decided upon. Some mentioned that this may be what will come out of the Wageningen meeting although no-one seemed sure of this.

- Question 24.** A. Are there any issues that you raised that you feel were not adequately discussed in the conference?
B. Do you feel that your concerns were adequately represented in the discussion?

There was very little consensus among the respondents to this question. Many limited their

answers to “yes” or “no” with no elaboration. There were many more that said “no” to A and “yes” to B than the reverse however, indicating that for the most part most of the participants’ concerns were represented. Others suggested issues that may have been addressed that were not; or ones that should have been given more attention. They are as follows:

- Issues (environmental, economic) affecting the real small farmers.
- Understanding the “implicit culture of the farmer”.
- The economic limitations of management options and how these can be addressed.
- The role of globalization as a force inhibiting sustainable development; and the effects of decisions made outside local communities on the ability of these to make environmentally sensitive decisions.
- The role of transnational corporations (TNCs)
- Farming of other native species ie: deer etc. / Indigenous livestock.
- Commercial and technical aspects such as organic production standards and organic markets.
- Industrial livestock systems.
- Role of extensive ranching/grazing systems in conservation of biological and landscape diversity. Neotropical savanna grazing systems.
- Deforestation.
- The impact that global warming could have on the livestock industry, and the measures the industry could be taking to reduce emissions.
- Assessments of environmental effects at the regional level.
- Decision making processes (in relation to the political solutions sought)
- Long term aspects and political implications.
- Social and economic issues.
- How to better value the benefits of livestock systems to people.

Several argued that many issues were put on the table but were never discussed at any length.

Question 25. Is there anything else (comment, suggestion, etc.) that you would like to add?

Almost all of the respondents took this question as an opportunity to thank and congratulate the conference initiators, the organizers, their colleagues (other participants), and most of all the manager and moderator for an excellent conference.

Many of the responses expressed an interest in follow-up activities (Virtual Centre, Second LxE conference !...) and an anxious anticipation of the results from the Wageningen meeting being held on June 16-20, 1997. A few are expecting a final report.

Other participants took the opportunity to comment on their perception of this conference as a step ahead in the constructive use of information and communication technologies, and in global conferencing. Meanwhile, the lagging development of information technology in the developing



world was(is) a pressing concern for several who asked that an effort be made to enhance the participation (and the access to electronic communications) of stakeholders in the South. One suggested that the organizers provide individual countries and/or regions with guidelines on how to organize their own conferences, while another said that he/she is “imitating the exercise in [his/her] quest for the response to forestry problems” in his/her country.

Many of the answers to this question provided suggestions for “next time”. They are:

- Journals, papers, bulletins, books relating to the topics should be introduced for further reading on specific subjects.
- It is very difficult to answer “true” or “false” to the evaluation questions.
- Present keynote papers representing different points of view to stimulate more discussion.
- The duration of the conference should be limited to eight weeks and material sent should be in a format that the participants, especially those in the developing countries with e-mail only facilities, can access files easily. A few responses argued that the conference should have spanned a longer time period to allow time to digest some of the material.
- Address a more specific issue. A series of more specific conferences ?
- With regard to time constraints and volume of material, one person suggested possibly enhancing the role of moderator to synthesize lengthy submissions. Another commended the use of summaries in the conference. Yet another suggested that lengthy entries contain lists of keywords and summaries to guide readers.
- “Further attempts should be made to have group meetings for those who don’t have Internet access of their own”.

As a closing comment, a couple of the participants expressed their concern that identifying and discussing problems, as was done in the conference, is a first step to action but that action is usually delayed or crippled. They hoped that this would not be the case with this conference.